



THE COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

fact sheet

Education and New York's Asian American Children

The number of Asian American school-aged children and adolescents in New York City is growing rapidly. The population itself is ethnically diverse. It is a mix of recent immigrants, and children and grandchildren of immigrants. Much of their educational and developmental needs are unique, characterized by the stress of acculturation and intergenerational conflict.

Despite common stereotypes of Asian Americans' high educational achievement, Asian Americans are represented at both ends of the spectrum of educational attainment. In New York City, while 36.1% of Asian Americans age 25 and over have at least a college degree, 23.9% did not complete high school.¹

UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH

Comprehending English is a significant hurdle for a large percentage of foreign-born Asian New Yorkers of all ages. Many immigrants arrive knowing little or no English. Of all Asian American children in NYS, 96% live in households with foreign-born parents.² A total of 45.7% of New York City Asian households were deemed

to be linguistically isolated (meaning no one over 14 speaks English "very well") in 1990.¹

The 1990 Census found that in Queens, 33% of Asian American children ages 5 to 13 spoke only an Asian language and were, therefore, linguistically isolated. By ages 14 to 17, the 1990 Census found that the segment that spoke only an Asian language had dropped to 16.7%.

During the 1998-1999 school year, 10.8% of the total student population in the city's public schools was Asian American.³ That same year, 27,329 children with limited English proficiency accounted for nearly one-quarter of Asian American students.

Children whose predominant lan-

guage is an Asian language accounts for almost one-fifth of all English Language Learners (ELL).

THE PROGRESS OF ELL STUDENTS⁴

The New York City Board of Education found that ELL students who entered the school system early, i.e., in kindergarten and grade 1, acquired English proficiency relatively quickly and were highly successful on standardized tests. In general, students with relatively strong proficiency in both English and their home language were able to meet the program exit criterion. However, students who started with relatively low levels of proficiency in English and in their home language, and students who entered the school system late, i.e., in grade 6 or later, had more trouble meeting the exit criterion and had lower graduation rates.

Among all the ELL students in the cohort class of 2000 (those who entered grade 9 in 1996 or who were in grade 11 during the school year of 1998-1999), whose home language is Chinese, more than half did not take the English Regents exam, less than a quarter passed, and almost one-fifth did not pass. Of all *see page 2 >*

PREDOMINANT ASIAN LANGUAGES OF ELL STUDENTS IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1998-1999

LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	PERCENT OF TOTAL ELL STUDENTS
Chinese	15,395	10.4%
Bengali	3,768	2.5%
Urdu	3,087	2.1%
Korean	2,447	1.7%
Punjabi	1,894	1.3%
Hindi	738	Less than 1%

Source: Facts & Figures, Board of Education of the City of New York, 1999

those who did pass, the majority of them barely passed with a grade of 55 to 64 out of 100. Failing to pass the English Regents exam results in not being able to graduate high school.

FAILING TO GRADUATE

Many recent Asian immigrants, particularly those from very poor and rural backgrounds, may have little formal education and may not be able to read or write even in their native language. While younger children easily acquire English, adolescent immigrants have more difficulty and less years in school to master English. In the graduating class of 1999, 12.4% of the students are Asian. Almost one-third of Asian American students failed to graduate from the city's public schools with their class; 10.0% of the students dropped out before reaching graduation, and 22.5% failed to graduate on time but continued their studies.⁵

LACK OF ASIAN AMERICAN PRESENCE

Although 10.8 % of the student body is Asian American, only 1.2 % of principals/assistant principals and 2.8% of teachers are Asian American.³ The low number of Asian Americans on school staff can lead to linguistic and cultural miscommunications between faculty, staff, students, and parents. In addition, students have few Asian

GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS, CLASS OF 1999

	% GRADUATES	% DROPOUTS	% STILL ENROLLED
Asian	67.5%	10.0%	22.5%
White	71.3%	10.4%	18.4%
Black	44.4%	18.6%	37.0%
Hispanic	40.2%	22.4%	37.5%
TOTAL NYC	50.1%	17.5%	32.4%

Source: Class of 1999 Four Year Longitudinal Report and Event Drop Out Rates, Board of Education of the City of New York

American role models in their schools. On top of this, many schools do not include in the curriculum aspects of Asian American history and culture. Schools may feel Asians are represented in world history classes, but do not acknowledge the presence and impact of Asians in U.S. history, society, and culture.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE TO CONSIDER

Many Asian American students, regardless of immigration or citizenship status, are taught at home to respect authority and rules, and remain modest. These ideals may conflict with American expectations of students within a school environment that awards outspokenness and promotes individual thinking.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Cultural and language barriers have

an impact on the involvement of Asian American parents in their children's schools. American schools encourage parent involvement and activism. In Asia, teachers have a great deal of authority and parents are not expected to actively participate in the schools. Many immigrant parents may be unfamiliar with what being an "involved parent" entails. Since meetings and other activities are not usually scheduled to accommodate immigrant parents' long and late work hours, many Asian American parents may not have the time, nor the flexible schedule, to become active in their child's school. Parents who are not English proficient may be intimidated or embarrassed, and choose not to become involved, especially if schools do not make translated materials and interpreters available. ❖

¹ 1990 Census, US Bureau of the Census ² *Housing and Vacancy Survey*, US Census Bureau, 1996 ³ *Facts & Figures 1998-1999*, Board of Education of the City of New York, 1999 ⁴ ELL Subcommittee Research Studies Progress Report, Board of Education of the City of New York ⁵ *Class of 1999 Four Year Longitudinal Report and Event Drop Out Rates*, Board of Education of the City of New York

PRODUCED BY: The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, 120 Wall Street, Third Floor, New York, NY 10005
 Tel: 212-809-4675 Fax: 212-344-5636 Email: cacf@cafc.org Website: www.cacf.org

THE COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES seeks to improve the quality of life for the New York City Asian American community by facilitating access to health and human services that are sensitive to all Asian American children and families.

OTHER FACT SHEETS IN THIS SERIES: ❖ Snapshots of New York City: An Overview of Asian American Families ❖ Child and Family Health of New York's Asian American Community ❖ Understanding the Issues Around Child Abuse and Neglect and Asian American Children

DEVELOPED WITH FUNDING FROM THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION, THE CHILD WELFARE FUND, AND THE FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK. APRIL 2001